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scale: 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest)  score  rank  trend

This report is part of the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI) 2012. The BTI is a global assessment of transition processes in which the state of democracy and market economy as well as the quality of political management in 128 transformation and developing countries are evaluated.

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### Executive Summary

During the period under review, the transformation of the Republic of Congo (also referred to as Congo-Brazzaville or the Congo) was marked by continuous political and economic consolidation after years of civil war and violence. While the pressure of non-state militant forces faded, the 2009 presidential election reinforced and consolidated the power of the de facto autocratic Sassou-Nguesso regime, thereby stabilizing the state’s authority, too. Thanks to both political stabilization and booming oil prices, the largely oil-based economy also improved. In 2009, negative effects of the global financial and economic crisis on export income and government revenue have been lessened by a substantial increase of the Congo’s oil production.

In Congo-Brazzaville, this political transformation did not in any way mean democratization. Rather, the outcome of the transformation and consolidation process has been a caricature of democracy that props up an authoritarian and largely personalized regime that relies on clientelistic networks and corruption. The opposition remains weak and is unable to challenge the government effectively. The regime, increasingly dominated by citizens from Sassou-Nguesso’s home region, has been able to consolidate its position against potential challengers with divisive bait-and-switch tactics. The regime is more threatened by internal divisions than by outside forces; indeed, instability is now likely only if Sassou-Nguesso were to suddenly become incapacitated, generating a power struggle within the current coalition. Economic stabilization, which helped to consolidate the political system and the peace process, was organized by policies modeled on IMF and World Bank conditionality, which opened up access to debt relief for Congo-Brazzaville. The implementation of market economy policies has been slow, however, while the urgently needed diversification of the economy has not yet materialized. The state oil company, moreover, remains under the control of Sassou-Nguesso’s family and trusted advisors. Transformation in terms of political democratization, economic liberalization and deregulation is initiated by external pressure from the IMF, the World Bank and other donors; reforms do not originate in domestic politics. Policies to stimulate the development of the

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### Key Indicators

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Sources: The World Bank, World Development Indicators 2011 | UNDP, Human Development Report 2011. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than $2 a day.
country should include a campaign against corruption. The education and empowerment of women, youth and children should become a political priority.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

The political and economic transformation of the Republic of Congo began in 1989 – 1990. Domestic and external pressures combined to convince the self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist government of General Denis Sassou-Nguesso to take steps in the direction of major political and economic change. Given the country’s historical burdens and structural weaknesses, transformation became an extremely conflict-ridden affair, inciting insoluble power struggles, political violence and civil war, which caused considerable destruction of infrastructure, serious disruption of parts of the economy and tremendous hardships for a substantial portion of the population.

The country’s political conflicts began in 1960, when it won its independence from France. The colonial power left the country without providing for a political environment that would have ensured stability and socioeconomic prosperity. Ethnic rivalry, social and regional disparities, and mounting power struggles over the control of oil, the main export product, all resulted in two decades of political instability and crisis. Weak leadership, military coups and political murder – including that of the most prominent victim, President Marien Ngouabi, in 1977 – have endangered the country’s future. Although in 1970, two years after the 1968 military coup, a “People’s Republic” under the one-party rule of the Parti Congolaise du Travail (PCT) was established, the country became politically stable for a decade only after Sassou-Nguesso seized power in 1979. Under his leadership, the “People’s Republic of Congo” consolidated as a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist state with much encumbering state involvement in economic, social and cultural affairs.

After the fall of several eastern European communist and African autocratic governments in 1989 – 1990, the Sassou-Nguesso regime officially renounced Marxist-Leninist ideology and acquiesced to popular demands for a multiparty system in 1991. A national conference brought together the major political forces of the country, paving the way for a new multiparty constitution and changing the name of the country from the “People’s Republic” to the “Republic of Congo.”

In the elections of 1992 and 1993, Sassou-Nguesso and the PCT lost power to a coalition of political parties under the leadership of Pascal Lissouba, who became the new president of the country. Although Lissouba, who was politically committed to democratic and market economy structures, won the second ballot by 61% against Bernard Kolélas (Sassou-Nguesso came in third in the first round), the results of the 1993 legislative elections were violently disputed, especially in Brazzaville and the Pool region.
Lissouba and his political party, the Union Panafricaine pour la Démocratie Sociale (UPADS), were primarily backed by the Nibolek region (which comprises the administrative units of Niari, Bouenza and Lekoumou) in the central-southern part of the country, which is inhabited by a number of ethnic groups, including the Bemba, Teke and Nzabi. Kolélas and his Mouvement Congolais pour la Démocratie et le Développement Intégral (MCDDI) had their strongholds in the Ba Congo population, especially the Lari subgroup, in Brazzaville and the surrounding Pool region in the extreme south. By contrast, Sassou-Nguesso, the PCT and the majority of the country’s military officers had their roots in the Mbochi ethnic group of the central-northern part of the country.

In 1997, Sassou-Nguesso was able to return to power after a brief civil war, owing to both decisive military support from Angola and political backing from France. Thereafter, anti-Sassou-Nguesso militia were no match for the regime’s military might, and the government has been able to impose a “national dialogue” (Dialogue National sans exclusive and peace regulations on them since 2001. The government’s position was further consolidated when Kolélas and Lissouba, both exiled, were sentenced in absentia in 2000 and 2001 respectively, the former to death and the latter to 30 years of hard labor.

In January 2002, a new multiparty constitution was endorsed by a national referendum. This constitution, like that of the 1990s, included articles concerning the separation of powers, multiparty rule, civil liberties and human rights, but it also strengthened the president’s position. Subsequently, Sassou-Nguesso and his PCT-led coalition won the 2002 presidential, legislative, senatorial and local elections with tremendous margins, mainly due to substantial irregularities. The elections, which were overshadowed by ongoing violence in the Pool region, enabled Sassou-Nguesso and his political allies to establish and maintain a strong authoritarian-style government.

Owing to its military supremacy, in March 2003, the Brazzaville regime was able to impose a peace agreement on the Conseil National de Résistance (CNR) militia still inhabiting the Pool region, which was headed by a Pentecostal clergyman and military commander named Frédéric Bitsangou, also known as “Pasteur Ntoumi.” However, rebel mistrust of the government continued, and quite a few of them refused to lay down arms. Yet, as the rebels were not militarily capable of challenging the government, Ntoumi and his militia were forced to renew the peace agreement in May 2007. In May 2008, the militia was formally disbanded and the CNR transformed into a political party (“Conseil National des Républicains,” which has the same acronym – CNR – as Conseil National de Résistance). Only in December 2009 did Ntoumi came out of the bush to take over a government post “Délégué général chargé de la promotion des valeurs de paix et de la réparation des séquelles de guerre” (“general delegate in charge of promoting peace and post-conflict reconstruction”) offered to him by the regime in 2007.

Sassou-Nguesso has been able to reinforce his power in the 2007 National Assembly, 2008 partial Senatorial and July 2009 presidential elections. While the PCT-led coalition retained a large majority in the lower and upper houses of parliament, the president has been re-elected, lacking a major competitor, with almost 79% of votes. Meanwhile, the regime feels strong
enough to integrate erstwhile enemies into its system, offering benefits based on the allocation of oil revenue. In a carrot-and-stick approach, making use of revenue but also threatening the non-compliant with the use of military force, the regime has not only been able to “buy” Ntoumi and his militia out of the bush but also attract Kolélas who returned from exile in 2005 under an amnesty. Kolélas chose to work under the Brazzaville regime, allying his MCDDI party to the PCT caucus. However, the political influence of his party faded when he died in 2009.

As opposed to Kolélas’ compliance, former President Lissouba preferred to stay in exile, although Sassou-Nguesso attempted to lure him back into the country by offering a full-scale amnesty, too.

The process of political transformation in Congo-Brazzaville has been overshadowed and shaped by violent power struggles. Efforts to transform the country’s economy from a highly state-interventionist (“socialist”) system to a more market-oriented system have also been impeded by these conflicts. The Sassou-Nguesso regime, feeling the pressure for reconstruction, poverty reduction and economic development, acknowledged the need to approach the IMF and the World Bank for help. In 2004 and again in 2008, the Congo concluded mid-term loan arrangements with the IMF. Although the government subordinated its policies to IMF conditionality, economic transformation toward a market economy went on only gradually, dogged by a cycle of progress and setbacks. Even windfall profits from oil exports in the 2005 – 2008 period did not help enough to bolster transformation-oriented economic performance, which suffered a slowdown, especially in the 2009 global financial and economic crisis. When the Congo reaffirmed its official commitment to IMF-style policies in 2010, the country was allowed to proceed to the “Completion Point” of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) debt relief initiative of the IMF and the World Bank, leading, inter alia, to full debt forgiveness by the Paris Club. As the Congo has been able to boost its oil production, resulting in an upward trend of export revenue, the government could conceivably reinvest revenues to facilitate economic diversification, which virtually all observers regard as crucial for long-term growth. Yet the government has so far resisted this. With oil sector revenue remaining opaque as ever, there is strong evidence that the Sassou-Nguesso government prefers massive corruption to the sort of infrastructural investments and anti-poverty programs that would lift its population from poverty.
The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 10 (best) to 1 (worst).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

The government’s monopoly on the use of force is intact in most regions within the Republic of Congo. Nevertheless, there are instances in which members of the security forces act independently of government authority, committing what are sometimes serious human rights abuses.

As a result of years of war and violence, part of the Pool region remains fragile in security terms despite continued efforts to enforce the March 2003 and May 2007 peace deals. However, militia activities and the risk of renewed violence substantially decreased. From October 2010, the Congolese military has been able to move to parts of the Pool region that had been “no go” areas for many years. Remnants of the “Ntsilulu” militia, led by Frederic Bitsangou, officially disbanded in 2008 and have been mostly inactive since then, but remain a potential source of trouble. In 2010 Bitsangou accepted a position in Sassou-Nguesso’s government, first offered in 2007, and competed, unsuccessfully, for a parliamentary seat.

Constitutionally and legally, all people born in the Republic of Congo are citizens. While citizenship itself is not disputed, major discrimination patterns between the country’s ethnic groups are common. According to the constitution, Congolese citizens are allowed to change their nationality or to adopt the citizenship of another country without losing their Congolese citizenship. Indigenous people, so-called Pygmies, suffer systematic discrimination that amounts to a withholding of citizenship rights. However, in recent years the government has undertaken (inter alia, by legislation) to improve the situation of this group – especially its children – in reaction to international (UN) pressure.

In recent years, the Sassou-Nguesso government has come to be more dominated by Cuvette regionals – Cuvette is Sassou-Nguesso’s home region – than ever before. This trend is especially pronounced at the top levels of the military and more sensitive ministerial and parastatal positions. Southerners generally have access
only to the least important ministerial portfolios. All this, however, is a problem for
execution of the rule of law rather than citizenship.

The constitution provides for the separation of church and state, and Article 18
unequivocally forbids the use of religion for political aims. Although most political
elites are Catholic, the Church’s leadership hails mostly from southern regions, and
hence exerts relatively little influence on the government leadership. However, the
social and political influence of other Christian denominations – such as
Protestantism, Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism – is growing. In total, the
population is largely Christianized, although remnants of traditional African
religions remain strong, especially in rural areas. About 2% of the population
practices Islam.

Administrative and public security systems are in place, but their performance is
impaired by corruption, low professional skills, ethnic rivalries and heterogeneous
state structures. Decentralization is not working well, and state authority remains a
highly centralized affair, the better for Sassou-Nguesso’s government to control the
flow of state revenue.

2 | Political Participation

The 2002 constitution calls for free and fair elections with universal suffrage, but
elections organized within that framework have been corrupted by both the
regime’s dominance and the opposition’s weakness. For instance, this was a major
feature in the 2002 and July 2009 presidential elections as well as the 2002 and
2007 national parliamentary elections. From 2002, there was no election that did not
reinforce the supremacy of the PCT and President Sassou-Nguesso, who
consistently refrains from promoting an open, competitive multiparty system.
According to the EIU, the regime’s commitment to holding free and fair elections
remains poor. There is no independent electoral commission. Parties and individuals
who want to participate in the political process can only have influence if they work
within the framework imposed by the regime. Opposition parties and civic
organizations wield very limited power. Opposition candidates suffer from low
funding and inadequate organization, and they also receive less media coverage.
Elections in Congo-Brazzaville are best described as forced consent to the regime.

Given the supremacy of the regime in electoral procedures, the government is not
elected democratically in a real sense. Supported by expanding oil and timber
revenue, the government rules quite effectively, including in the historically
unstable Pool region. Since the military’s leadership is dominated by Sassou-
Nguesso’s family or longtime allies and its mid-level officer corps is dominated by
Cuvette regionals, it is highly unlikely that the military would act as a veto power.
According to the constitution, political and civil society organizations can form freely. However, the political system is shaped in favor of those organizations close to regime. Organizations representing interests contrary to those of the regime are allowed to exist provided they do not challenge Sassou-Nguesso’s authority and democratic credentials, but their influence remains limited. The civilian political opposition is fragmented into more than 100 organizations, and remains too weak to confront the government effectively.

According to the constitution, opinions may be expressed freely by citizens, political and civil society organizations as well as the mass media, including those based online. In reality, this freedom is restricted and regulated when it comes to criticism of the regime and its political priorities. However, the authorities allow moderate criticism as an outlet to ease political tensions. In 2010, the Republic of Congo ranked 114th out of 178 countries in Reporters Without Borders’ World Press Freedom Ranking and 110th out of 196 countries in the Freedom House’s Global Press Freedom Rankings, which classified the country as only “partly free.”

There are about 40 small private (mostly weekly) newspapers, which are concentrated in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire. The state publishes one newspaper, the country’s only daily publication, which dominates the news cycle. Some private newspapers are closely allied with the regime. The government has been slow to loosen its grip on the broadcast sector and continues to run the Radiodiffusion-Télévision Congolaise (RTC). The political profile of private radio remains generally low, and the dominant stations are owned by political elites. Political parties are not permitted to run their own radio or television programs. Internet sites that are radically critical of the regime can only operate outside the country. However, individuals and groups can engage in the peaceful expression of views via the internet, including via e-mail, inside the country, although these are monitored by the government.

3 | Rule of Law

The 2002 constitution provides for the separation of powers, including an independent judicial system and an effective “fourth power,” the media. In practice, however, there are no adequate checks and balances for these powers, since President Sassou-Nguesso and his political allies dominate all sectors of the political, judicial and media systems, including the government, both chambers of the national parliament, the Constitutional Court, other high-level courts and the broadcast media. Control mechanisms exercised by the legislative powers, the courts or the media are almost nonexistent (or exist only on paper). Political decision-making remains in the hands of the president and his closest advisers and allies in the PCT and associated political parties. Constitutionally, the president cannot be removed from office by a parliamentary vote. On the other hand, the
president is not allowed to dissolve the parliament, though given the extent to which he dominates it, he has little interest in doing so.

While the judiciary is independent in theory, in practice it continues to be overburdened, underfinanced and subject both to political influence and corruption. In general, it is largely politically compliant to the Sassou-Nguesso regime. From time to time, politically motivated judgments are handed down against regime opponents (e.g., in the cases of Lissouba and Kolélas). Moreover, after years of civil war and political instability, the technical capacities of the judiciary are still weak. There is a serious lack of trained staff who are able to work effectively when it comes to administering the rule of law. As a consequence of the weaknesses of the “modern” system, traditional courts retain broad jurisdiction, particularly in rural areas.

In theory, officeholders may be prosecuted under criminal law in cases involving corruption, abuse of power and high treason. In practice, however, evidence of such prosecution is extremely limited. If prosecution occurs, it is almost certainly motivated by Sassou-Nguesso’s desire to remove and weaken potential competitors than by the desire to strengthen the rule of law. Critics of corruption are more likely to be punished than corrupt lawbreakers.

Civil liberties (e.g. freedom of the press, of expression, assembly and religious affiliation) are guaranteed by the constitution. Yet although the general human rights record of Congo-Brazzaville has improved since 2002, it still remains poor. Nevertheless, the government claims to be committed to improving human rights and civil liberties by creating a National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and renaming the Ministry of Justice the “Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.” However, this approach lacks credibility.

To begin with, Congo-Brazzaville still numbers among those countries that inflict the death penalty. Nevertheless, capital punishment is currently not being carried out, according to Amnesty International. In addition to having the death penalty, human rights violations remain serious, including arbitrary arrests, physical abuse, torture, rape, killing (e.g. beating to death) and perpetrator impunity. Remnants of non-state militia continue to threaten the human rights and civil liberties of Congolese citizens, too. As is traditional in Congolese society, women and children suffer considerably from discrimination and violence, including sexual harassment, rape, compulsory labor, forced prostitution and human trafficking. The state does not protect them effectively. Moreover, there is strong discrimination against ethnic minorities, including some 300,000 non-Bantu Pygmies, which amounts to a de facto denial of citizenship. In most regions of the country, local ethnic majority populations discriminate against local ethnic minority groups. Since the state does not protect the population, citizens sometimes resort to vigilante justice, including killing suspected criminals. It remains very difficult in Congo-Brazzaville for
citizens to get justice for human rights violations committed by state actors. For instance, the families of 353 refugees who “disappeared” without a trace in the 1999 “Beach” incident on their return to the Republic of Congo continue to search for legal avenues to pursue their claims of criminal wrongdoing by individuals and the Congolese government. They do not accept a 2005 Brazzaville court ruling that acquitted 15 members of the state security forces of charges of committing crimes against humanity related to the unsolved fate of these 353 persons. Human rights groups and relatives of the missing have claimed they were arrested, tortured and then executed upon returning to Congo-Brazzaville from the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. They also claim that the security forces suspected them of backing the Ninja rebel group. The government has assumed responsibility for the disappearances in general terms without conceding any individual’s guilt. In 2006, the Supreme Court refused to consider an appeal.

4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

Despite its essentially undemocratic character, the institutions of the executive and legislative branches, the government and parliament are relatively stable, buoyed largely by the influx of oil and timber revenue. Indeed, any future instability is more likely to result from a power vacuum in the event of Sassou-Nguesso’s incapacitation than from public frustration – however justified – at elite corruption. Public administration and the judiciary suffer from pervasive corruption, a lack of professionalism and poor performance. State institutions are generally regarded as illegitimate, though the Congolese population has little recourse.

Given the very low democratic choice in elections, the Brazzaville regime can be classified as authoritarian. The stability of the Republic of Congo’s institutions has been reinforced by the 2009 presidential elections that gave no real chance to any political opposition. A large part of the population is unable or unwilling to challenge the stability of the institutions. However, powerful vested interests within the PCT framework, including the military, may be a matter of concern, particularly as Sassou-Nguesso attempts to usher in a new, younger generation of political elites, particularly dominated by Cuvette regionals, who owe their privileged positions entirely to him.

5 | Political and Social Integration

A heterogeneous and fragile multiparty system emerged from the transformation process of the early 1990s that was fragmented along ethnic, communal and regional lines. From the civil-war years of 1997 to 2002, the former single-state party, the PCT, has been able to restore its political supremacy in the country by co-opting many small parties and “Independents.” The PCT further consolidated its
position by creating the PCT-dominated Rassemblement de la Majorité Présidentielle (RMP) in 2007. In 2010, based on the 2007 elections, the RMP had 79 out of 137 seats in the National Assembly; another 47 seats were occupied by “Independents” and MCDDI politicians co-opted by the PCT. In the Senate, 59 out of 72 seats were controlled by the RMP while there were 11 “Independents” associated with the presidential majority. In the June 2008 local elections, the RMP and other pro-presidential parties took 614 out of 846 contested seats. Still, the RMP remains a loose alliance rather than a united entity, and the PCT itself has limited support outside of its northern strongholds. Thus, there is a perpetual need to build and maintain coalitions in order to organize a “majorité présidentielle.”

A large part of the opposition has been co-opted into the presidential system, attracted by the oil-wealth allocations offered by the regime. For instance, the MCDDI, under the leadership of Kolélas, eventually chose to cooperate with the PCT and the RMP. Since the MCDDI has a strong constituency in the Bacongo ethnic group and in Brazzaville, the coalition is important to Sassou-Nguesso for the purpose of national reconciliation, which he administers via a patronage-based system. However, the relationship with the MCDDI remains uneasy and burdensome. Apart from the MCDDI, major opposition parties include the Union Panafricaine pour la Démocratie Sociale (UPADS) and the CNR, which was officially renamed the Conseil National des Républicains in 2007. Opposition alliances formed in 2007 and 2009 respectively include the UPADS-led Alliance pour la Nouvelle République (ANR) and the Front des Parties de l’Opposition Congolaise (FPOC) headed by the Parti Social-Démocrate du Congo (PDSC). However, the viability of these alliances may be as limited as the viability of the former opposition alliances that eroded before the 2007 elections. Many of the opposition parties are burdened with internal problems, including a lack of resources, organization and personnel as well as internal frictions and leadership struggles. Many parties seem to be dependent upon a single person. One of the erstwhile relevant opposition parties, the Union pour la Démocratie et la République (UDR-Mwinda), almost faded away when its leader, former Prime Minister André Milongo, became sick long before he died in 2007; it is now riven by a succession dispute.

In general, the political opposition outside the PCT–RMP caucus appears weak and fragmented, reducing the checks and balances on the executive in the country. None of the opposition parties enjoys a powerful political base at national level. Political parties and alliances are largely based on regional frameworks, although there are few real policy differences between them. For the most part, the leadership of opposition parties and alliances appears almost as personalized and autocratic as it is at the PCT–RMP level.
The regime’s stranglehold on power seriously impairs the ability of CSOs to mediate between social forces and the political system. The topography of interest groups is meager, and important social interests (e.g. those of informal-sector workers, the rural population and women) are underrepresented. The trade unions, including the PCT-friendly Confédération Syndicale des Travailleurs Congolais (CSTC), the Confédération des Syndicats du Congo (CSC) and the Confédération des Syndicats Libres et Autonomes du Congo (COSYLAC), focus on basic issues important to their members, but they try to avoid direct political conflicts. In the area of human rights, organizations such as the Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l’Homme (OCDH) are striving to establish themselves as independent and trustworthy forces, but they have to act carefully in order to avoid repression; even mild dissent earns physical intimidation. Some of the most influential players are Catholic church leaders – the Archbishop of Brazzaville is particularly important here – who have stressed the importance of national reconciliation and criticized, for instance, the lack of transparency and accountability in the handling of state resources, particularly oil.

There is no empirical evidence regarding the citizens’ consent to democratic norms. Given the very limited democratic scope of elections under Sassou-Nguesso, official voter turnout ratios of 77.5% at the 2002 constitutional referendum or 66.4% at the 2009 presidential election are subject to a high level of suspicion. International observers have estimated voter participation in the 2007 parliamentary elections and the 2008 local elections to be very low. Although no official figures have been published, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) has spoken about an “estimated 10%–15%” voter turnout in the 2008 local elections; most of the foreign diplomatic corps in Brazzaville estimates turnout for the 2009 presidential elections at 10% as well.

However, the unwillingness to support the voting procedures imposed on the Congolese electorate by the government should not be misinterpreted as a lack of consent to democratic norms. Rather, staying away from the ballot box almost certainly indicated a certain degree of frustration, disillusionment and silent protest among a growing majority of the people.

Poverty, along with a low standard of economic and social development in the non-oil sectors of the country, has impaired the ability of individuals and society to organize. Although oil is the backbone of economic development and the elites, the majority of the population is forced to rely on the informal sector and subsistence agriculture to survive. Extended families, village communities and women’s groups are major frameworks of solidarity and self-organization. Within these forms of self-organization, interpersonal trust appears to be high. On a more national scale, however, matters are very different: Due to the increasing dominance of Cuvette regionals in high level political positions and economic affairs, southerners and northerners are extremely distrustful of each other, more commonly viewing each
other as adversaries to be defeated than compatriots. The civil wars between 1993 and, to some extent, the present are both evidence and exacerbator of this.

II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Congo-Brazzaville continues to face enormous economic and social challenges left over from years of civil war and political turbulence. The Sassou-Nguesso regime has not only faced the challenge of reconstruction but also the pressure of the IMF and international creditors to transform a strongly state-interventionist economy into a free market economy, which proved to be very difficult owing to vested interests and other obstacles. During the period under review, progress toward a more market-oriented economy has been continuously slow (temporarily ridden by setbacks), as the global financial and economic crisis made its impact felt in 2009. The government has only gradually improved its compliance with World Bank demands to ensure transparency in the oil sector, which accounted in 2009 for 59% of GDP, 93% of exports and 72% of government revenue.

In the UNDP HDI of 2010, Congo-Brazzaville attained an HDI value of 0.489, ranking 126th out of 169 countries. (The Congo’s HDI values have been readjusted not only for 2010 but also for preceding years to much lower levels than before.) The combined gross enrollment ratio has been estimated at 58.6%, while the female/male ratio in the population educated to at least secondary education was 0.899. The income Gini coefficient was 47.3 and the Gender Inequality Index (GII) 0.744. More than 50% of the population is living in a situation assessed as extreme poverty by international standards. A very tiny class of people in the state elite, the military and business circles can be perceived as rich, while the middle class is also small.

Congo continues to be wracked by severe social, economic and regional disparities that are a consequence of its one-sided integration into the global market economy, corruption and incompetence in government and economic management. Oil has been the backbone of the Republic of Congo’s economy for decades, a fact which was reinforced by the global market boom from 2004 to 2008. However, as the world market price of oil took a strong downswing in 2009 (following the global economic crisis), export income and government revenue decreased substantially in the same year, bringing the country’s oil dependency painfully to the minds of decision makers in Brazzaville. They were relieved when the oil price took an upturn again in 2010, providing some economic and financial breathing space.
Notwithstanding, the urgent need for diversification is indisputable. Taking into account oil-related vested interests of state elites, the military and international oil companies, it remains, however, doubtful if the government is ready to face the challenge of coping with one-sided dependencies.

The hydrocarbon (oil and gas) sector is concentrated in the coastal zone near Pointe-Noire, which is the economic capital of the country. It is a very capital-intensive industry with low labor requirements. The sector remains a world-market-oriented enclave in the country, with only low trickle-down effects for the majority of the population. In 2009, the non-oil sectors contributed a mere 41% of GDP. While a large majority of the working force has been trying to earn a living outside the hydrocarbon sector, agriculture, fisheries and forestry combined made up only 5% of GDP, while non-oil industries and services contributed 8% and 28% respectively. Much of the non-oil-based GDP is generated in the informal sector. Despite the negligible GDP share of agriculture, a substantial share (38%) of the population still lives and works in rural areas.

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<td>2.7</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign direct investment</td>
<td>% of GDP</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export growth</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Import growth</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current account balance</td>
<td>$ mn.</td>
<td>-2181.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public debt</td>
<td>% of GDP</td>
<td>98.5</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External debt</td>
<td>$ mn.</td>
<td>5647.5</td>
<td>5932.4</td>
<td>4902.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total debt service</td>
<td>$ mn.</td>
<td>107.3</td>
<td>182.0</td>
<td>163.3</td>
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### Economic Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Indicator</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Cash surplus or deficit % of GDP</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax revenue % of GDP</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government consumption % of GDP</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public expnd. on edu. % of GDP</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public expnd. on health % of GDP</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D expenditure % of GDP</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military expenditure % of GDP</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
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</table>


### 7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

The government is moving from a state-run economy to a more market-oriented system, but progress remains slow, and the country continues to be plagued by corruption, deficiencies in the rule of law and inefficient state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Although the regime has been forced to pursue economic policies in line with IMF and World Bank conditions, the Congo-Brazzaville was still struggling among the worst performing countries in 2010 as regards economic liberalization. In the 2010 Index of Economic Freedom (published by the Heritage Foundation) the country ranked only 168th out of 179 classified countries, while in the most recent (2011, published in 2010) Doing Business Index of the World Bank, it came 177th out of 183 classified countries.

Despite the government’s avowed commitment to pursuing market-oriented policies, including the privatization or restructure of some major SOEs, the Republic of Congo still has a long way to go before it will have a fully functioning, competitive market economy. In particular, the IMF has urged the Republic of Congo: “to bring the internal controls and accounting system of the state-owned oil company (Société Nationale des Pétroles du Congo, SNPC) up to internationally recognized standards; prevent conflicts of interests in the marketing of oil; require SNPC officials to publicly declare and divest any interests in companies having a business relationship with SNPC; and implement an anti-corruption action plan with international support.” Progress in the direction demanded by the IMF has been very slow (even suffering temporary setbacks) in the period under review. Indeed, the SNPC and related downstream sectors remain dominated by Sassou-Nguesso’s family members.
There is no information regarding anti-cartel legislation. However, there is clear evidence that state monopolies operate in “strategic” sectors of the economy, including that of oil. In what is sometimes a cat-and-mouse game, the Sassou-Nguesso regime tries to defend state monopolies against external pressure, largely from the IMF and World Bank, to liberalize and deregulate the economy. The Sassou-Nguesso government gained “Heavily Indebted Poor Country” status from the IMF/World Bank in 2010, and with it debt forgiveness, largely as result of French lobbying. With that status secured, Sassou-Nguesso now has much less interest in appeasing international donors. Recent SNPC appointments thus reinforce Sassou-Nguesso’s direct control over the oil sector.

Although the Republic of Congo is officially committed to the liberalization of its economy, to a large extent the foreign trade regime remains under the control of the state and its actors. The most significant barriers include import and export quotas, restrictive import licensing rules, bureaucracy, government export-promotion programs, an inefficient customs service and, once again, corruption.

The financial sector and the banking system have been largely privatized. Major banks, including Crédit du Congo, BGFI Bank Congo and La Congolaise de Banques, are now in foreign private hands, mostly from France and Gabon. Ravaged by war and political turbulence, however, the financial sector is still weak and in need of further consolidation. Regulation and supervision is inadequate, and there is no functioning capital market. A micro-finance sector, which aims to support small-scale projects, especially in rural areas, is being developed. Non-resident investors face bureaucratic obstacles to getting access to loans in CFA francs.

8 | Currency and Price Stability

As a member of the Central African Economic and Monetary Union (Communauté économique et monétaire de l’Afrique centrale, CEMAC), Congo-Brazzaville uses the CFA franc, which is pegged to the euro. Thus, the stability of the currency is to a large extent influenced by decision-making in the euro zone. Another important factor is the monetary policy of the Bank of Central African States (Banque des Etats de l’Afrique centrale, BEAC), the central bank of the CEMAC countries, which is located in Yaoundé, Cameroon. According to the IMF, BEAC policy aims to maintain price stability and strengthen the external position of CEMAC members. There is no clearly defined national policy regarding price stability and foreign exchange. The IMF is putting pressure on the Brazzaville government to subordinate its policies to IMF rules. When IMF pressure lessens the government may feel inclined to leave the path.
Congo’s average annual rate of inflation scored 5.2% between 2008 and 2010, exceeding 6% in 2008. The world market situation of oil, gas and food can threaten price stability at the national level. While a boom based on oil has raised Congo’s export income and state revenue to unforeseen levels from 2004 to 2008, the oil economy has suffered a world-market-related downturn in 2009, taking an upturn again in 2010. As a result of the boom, the country has not only received large surplus amounts of foreign exchange but has also faced the challenge of a major increase in the amount of money in circulation. By contrast, inflationary pressure has lessened in 2009 due to the effects of the global economic crisis. From 2010, with the global economy rebounding, Congo-Brazzaville started to face new risks of inflationary pressure, fueled by high oil prices, rising export income and enhanced government revenue. Preliminary reports suggest the Congolese economy grew by as much as 10%, affirming concerns about inflation.

Given the Congo’s dependency on food imports, inflationary pressures can also be attributed to soaring international food prices, which has been felt mostly in the period preceding 2009 and once again from 2010 onwards. Food subsidies are politically motivated, as the government attempts to reduce food costs to placate the urban population.

As the economy of Congo-Brazzaville remains heavily dependent upon oil, world markets, international donor commitments and external debt relief, it is very difficult for any government of the country – whatever the political color of the regime – to pursue consistent fiscal and debt policies. As the Sassou-Nguesso regime, bowing to the oil-related vested interests of the state elites, the military and international oil companies, does not show a determined inclination to change the dependency path, it can be held (at least partly) responsible for its incapacity to enforce such policies.

However, the government undertook steps to comply with IMF conditionality, albeit only gradually. In December 2008, Congo-Brazzaville concluded the second consecutive mid-term IMF Extended Credit Facility (ECF) agreement (formerly PRGF), stretching to 2011. Subsequently, the Congo managed to accomplish the “Completion Point” of the HIPC debt relief initiative of the IMF and the World Bank in January 2010. The Paris Club conceded complete debt forgiveness in March 2010. Owing to debt relief, major macroeconomic data improved in 2010, including public debt (less than 20% of GDP), external debt (just above $2 billion) and foreign exchanges reserves (more than $4 billion). The current account also took a positive turn. At the surface, at least, a process toward macrostability has been initiated. However, macrostability is highly vulnerable to challenges of any kind caused by national or international developments in the oil sector. This has been underlined equally by the 2004 – 2008 boom in international demand and the resulting high price of oil and by the 2009 drop and once more by the upturn which started in 2010. Hence, the perspective of macrostability remains erratic and
unpredictable. If the government did not feel the need to comply with IMF policies the Congo would not have the institutional safeguards and capabilities to pursue policies suitable for achieving macrostability. With HIPC status and debt forgiveness secured, observers expect the Sassou-Nguesso government to dismantle some of the institutional safeguards recently put in place.

9 | Private Property

The state remains a major property owner of both real estate and land but does not generally discriminate against private and especially foreign investors. However, privatization has been slow and state-owned enterprises have a disproportionate influence on economic performance and business conditions in key sectors. State influence, bureaucracy and corruption are significant impediments to the protection of property rights.

The EIU has mentioned “security risks to business in Congo” resulting from “the lack in clarity of regulation, and slow and poorly functioning government institutions on which investors may depend for routine matters.” The EIU has also complained that the “security of contracts and the enforcement of justice cannot be guaranteed through the slow-moving justice system.” The country’s overburdened and insufficiently funded judicial system offers limited protection for business and property rights.

However, there have been no recent reports of state expropriation of major private assets.

The Brazzaville government is under strong pressure to improve the investment climate for private, and especially foreign, capital. Bowing to the IMF and the World Bank, the government has declared its official commitment to encouraging private-sector investment and to allowing the privatization of state-owned enterprises. There are several major obstacles to privatization, including vested interests within the state elite that wish to retain public ownership, a lack of political will to ensure the smooth privatization of state companies, and areas of political instability and corruption that act as disincentives to private investment. The very poor performance of the Brazzaville government regarding the private-sector issue has been reflected in the Congo’s poor performance in the World Bank’s Doing Business Index as quoted above.

10 | Welfare Regime

In the Republic of Congo, most people are forced to rely on family and community structures as the social basis of survival. Subsistence agriculture and the informal sector shape the living conditions of a large majority of the population. For
employees in the formal economy, a basic social security system has been established that provides for insurance in cases of accidents, illnesses, disability, old age and death, as well as maternity and family allowances. Moreover, a legal minimum wage is in place. Retired high-level civil servants and state employees are supported by the Caisse de Retraite des Fonctionnaires (CRF), whereas the Caisse Nationale de Sécurité Sociale (CNSS) is responsible for other beneficiaries. Despite some increases in payments, made possible by the 2004 – 2008 oil boom, the amounts available for most beneficiaries remain generally low, and most public sector employees engage in corruption to ensure their post-retirement welfare. With international assistance, special programs have been created for demobilized civil-war combatants in order to encourage their reintegration into civilian life. These programs, however, have been governed by Sassou-Nguesso political allies – Michel Ngakala, most notably – who have generally embezzled foreign funding at the expense of reintegration programs.

Equal opportunity does not exist. In particular, there are strong biases in terms of ethnicity and gender. There are institutions tasked with compensating for gross social differences, but they are limited in scope and quality. Discrimination against women is ubiquitous in most sectors of the economic, social and political systems, while access to – and exclusion from – opportunities is highly dependent on the ethnic origin of the individuals involved. Discrimination also limits access to secondary and tertiary education as well as to public office.

With the rise of female ministers in successive Sassou-Nguesso governments, regional discrimination is perhaps now more salient, with high level ministerial, parastatal, and military posts reserved exclusively for Cuvette regionals and other northerners.

11 | Economic Performance

Supported by high levels of international demand and prices of oil – the country’s major source of income – the economy has been able to recover slowly from wartime crisis during the 2004 – 2008 period. The recovery was also assisted by external debt relief and international donor commitments. However, the process was far from sustainable, with erratic developments in some macroeconomic data. In 2009, the country has been affected by the global financial and economic crisis, meaning a substantial decrease of oil price and demand as well as export income and government revenue. However, the decline has been cushioned by a remarkable increase of the Congo’s oil production, which went up from 235,000 b/d in 2008 to 301,000 b/d in 2009 and a projected 340,000 b/d in 2010, according to EIU figures.

In the 2008 – 2010 period, the enhanced levels of domestic oil production, combined with growth of non-oil sectors like construction, transport and telecoms,
tended to stabilize economic development despite the temporary downturn of export income and government revenue. According to IMF estimates, per capita GDP (PPP) rose from $14,323 in 2008 to $15,534 in 2009 and $17,342 in 2010 (the benefit of which went mainly to the oil companies and the state elites). Also according to the IMF, the GDP grew by 5.6% in 2008, 7.5% in 2009 and a projected 10.6% in 2010, with inflation oscillating between 4% and just above 6%. Growth of the non-oil economy has been estimated at 5.4% in 2008, 3.9% in the crisis year 2009 and 6.1% in 2010. Reflecting the effects of the 2009 global economic crisis, the current account fell to a deficit of 7.7% of GDP in 2009 from a surplus of 0.6% of GDP in 2008 but rebounded to a surplus of a projected 4.2% of GDP in 2010, while government revenue amounted to 47.3% of GDP in 2008, 29.5% in 2009 and a projected 45.5% of GDP in 2010. Gross capital formation represented 22.1%, 24.6% and a projected 23.7% of GDP in 2008, 2009 and 2010, respectively. Government debt slightly decreased from 60.3% of GDP in 2008 to 57.8% in 2009. For 2010, the IMF projected a sharp decline to 19.1% of GDP, including the effects of comprehensive debt relief and debt forgiveness after Congo-Brazzaville reached the “Completion Point” of the HIPC debt reduction initiative of the IMF and the World Bank.

Notwithstanding, economic trends remain generally erratic and fragile, depending largely on oil revenue and the level of national oil production, which is projected by the EIU to take an upturn to reach 375,000 b/d in 2012. Although the subsistence subsector of agriculture is an important part of the economy in terms of employment and food provision, agriculture in general is also a sector traditionally neglected by governments and their developmental policies. Thus, Congo-Brazzaville remains heavily dependent on food imports to meet the needs of the urban – and increasingly urbanizing – population. Moreover, the industrial sector outside the oil industry remains fairly weak, and the tertiary sector does not form a pillar of the economy strong enough to compensate for losses caused by an occasional downturn in the oil industry.

12 | Sustainability

Tropical rainforests still cover more than half the territory of the Republic of Congo. However, wood is harvested on a commercial scale and, after oil, it is the second most important source of foreign exchange income. Deforestation, soil erosion and the pollution of the air, soil and water are the Republic of Congo’s primary environmental concerns. The country is also slightly affected by the local and subregional consequences of global warming, which sometimes means less rainfall than is usually expected or, at other times, heavy rains and flooding. A special sphere of environmental concern is the oil-producing region in the vicinity of Pointe-Noire, which brings high risks of pollution to the air, soil and water.
Ecological aspects of sustainability remain secondary in the formulation of economic policy; foresting licenses are often dispensed with little or no consideration of environmental impact. Political factors are more relevant concerns for the Sassou-Nguesso government. Since its primary constituency is located in the north, Sassou-Nguesso’s government requires foreign timber companies to invest in social projects – health clinics, schools, and roads – only in northern communities. Hence the timber sector is stratified, with European firms – bound by EU investment agreements, which require public investment – licensed to operate in the north, and East Asian timber firms more active in the south.

However, the Brazzaville government has chosen to participate in international – and, especially, central African – agreements on protecting tropical rainforests.

In 2010, Congo-Brazzaville ranked 105th out of 163 states measured by the Environmental Performance Index (EPI 54.0).

Education and training facilities are mostly concentrated in the large cities of Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire, and most of the country does not have sufficient education institutions, but although the education sector was significantly damaged during the civil war, the government has worked hard to rehabilitate it with international assistance. For instance, the gross enrollment rate at primary schools, which had plunged to a meager 50% in 1999, recovered to 108% (and 102% for girls) in 2006 and further increased to 114% (110%) in 2008, when the net enrollment rate was 82%. The rate of pre-primary schooling was 12%. The rate for secondary school enrollment was 44% in 2005 (the most recent year covered by estimates) while it was negligible at 2% in the tertiary sector. The quality of institutions, staff, curricula and material is very weak, leaving much to be desired.

Research and development are nascent at best. Shortcomings in the education and technology sectors form a huge obstacle to the country’s economic and social development.

Educational curricula, particularly at the university level, are subordinated to political interests. There is virtually no political or accounting instruction at either of the country’s universities, both dominated by the government.
Transformation Management

I. Level of Difficulty

The political leadership’s governance capacity is constrained by the Republic of Congo’s extremely high dependence on the export of oil and the international raw-material markets.

Policy implementation at all levels is mitigated by: vulnerability to external economic forces and globalization; insufficient and still-damaged infrastructure; domestic ethnic, regional and social conflicts; the weakness of civil society; and high levels of corruption.

However, dependence on oil and the other putative constraints – poor education, illiteracy, and infrastructural deficiencies – are themselves outcomes of governmental policies.

If anything, the government’s expanding revenue from oil production gives it an enormous capacity to pursue an alternative set of social and economic policies.

CSOs remain weak in terms of political power, but there are organizations dedicated to modest reform. These organizations are careful to articulate their positions in the least threatening manner possible, since criticism of the regime could result in a political backlash. As a rule, CSOs and NGOs avoid political statements that may provoke an unpleasant reaction from the state; instead, they pursue low-profile political issues in order to protect their specialized fields of activity from state interference. Many CSOs have an ethnic or ethno-regional basis.

Note, however, that village-level associations are historically very strong in Congo, even though they now have virtually no political leverage.

Ethnic, regional and social conflicts, including mass poverty, all contributed to the political turbulence and civil wars in the 1990s and early 2000s. These factors may also seriously endanger political processes, as well as social and economic development, in the years to come. Congolese society remains torn by conflicts that are boiling under the surface in an only superficially pacified country.
II. Management Performance

14 | Steering Capability

In order to overcome the problems posed by its violent recent past, the government must improve its governance and tackle corruption. Although the present government is aware of the scope of the problems it faces and possesses the management capabilities to overcome them, its policy priorities are currently inconsistent with sustainable development.

Given its large majority at the national parliamentary level, the political leadership should be able to organize its policy agenda without worrying about political competition. IMF, World Bank and donor pressure influence policy formation. However, the government is almost entirely preoccupied with sustaining its own power and maintaining the ruling coalition. Although it is occasionally able to articulate long-term developmental plans, most projects – such as the new international airport outside Oyo – serve only the interests of the ruling elite and are of doubtful economic relevance. A severe shortage of qualified professionals also adversely affects institutional capacity and effectiveness in outlying administrative districts. The leadership is officially committed to building democracy and a market economy, but its strategic aims are not commensurate with the country’s situation, problems and needs. The government does not formulate security, political, social, economic and environmental policies consistently enough to articulate clearly identifiable objectives and strategic priorities. Even if policies convey the impression of being in line with such objectives and priorities, the government does not really intend to follow these lines at all costs. Sooner or later, policies are corrupted by the vested interests of parts of the state elite. Economic diversification and political decentralization, for instance, are both desirable objectives, but they are predicated on the economic and political history of the country with its one-sided dependency on oil at the economic level and the heterogeneity of the population at the political level. Both objectives were subsequently adopted as valuable objectives by the government. Although the government is able to formulate such objectives and priorities, the realities of policy implementation are different. Economic diversification, for example, is far from coming to the surface, given the fact that the oil sector is still dominant. In the political sphere, administrative decentralization has not resulted in any real transfers of powers and competencies from the state to regional and local authorities. Although the constitution calls for a decentralized state, it effectively remains a highly centralized state.
The political leadership accepts the goals of both constitutional democracy and a socially responsible and ecologically sustainable market economy according to official statements. However, the government tends to execute policies derived from these insights only when pressured by the IMF, the World Bank or other international actors. For example, in theory, diversification of the economy is an official goal of economic policy. In reality, however, the implementation of this policy is impeded by vested interest of the state elite.

The political leadership seldom responds to mistakes and failed policies with meaningful adjustments. Indeed, most development projects serve the narrow interests of the elite rather than the economic interests of the rural and urban poor. Adjustment generally occurs only under external pressure from the IMF, the World Bank or other actors. Subsequently, failed policies are not corrected until they have failed completely or only when the economy displays indisputable symptoms of deterioration. Such slow policy learning makes the donor community reluctant to commit further resources to the Republic of Congo.

15 | Resource Efficiency

Due to the power of vested interests, the government uses only some of its available oil resources efficiently. To some extent, government officials and their entourages consume state resources themselves, although the precise extent of this embezzlement is unknown, since the government refuses to release oil revenue data. For example, as a result of clientelism, the cabinet comprises over 35 ministers; indeed, the 2002 constitution created a senate essentially appointed by local governments, another source of patronage. In some cases, the government has used windfall oil profits to reduce domestic and foreign debt. The IMF, the World Bank and the EIU consider the number of state employees to be too high. Furthermore, the bureaucracy suffers from a lack of skills and professionalism since it is, to a large extent, shaped by ethnic and regional clientelism rather than by merit.

Although the ruling coalition’s interests are remarkably homogeneous, it is hard to speak of policy coordination in terms of the normative framework of the BTI, even if limited to technocratic efficiency (and not democracy). Vested personal and corporate interests remain opposed to the government’s alleged goals of economic diversification and decreased reliance on the oil sector. Although the government claims to seek revenue diversification by investing oil revenues in growth sectors, in practice this seldom occurs. Most public works projects – particularly the Grands Travaux, supervised by Jean Jacques Bouya – provide high value consumption goods to the elite; their construction contracts are allocated to firms owned by members of the governing coalition. Rather than pursue sound long-term economic policies designed to lift large numbers of its citizens out of poverty, the government
generally prefers to enrich its constituent members. The government has yet to pursue economic policies likely to lift the rural and urban poor out of poverty.

Congo-Brazzaville takes part in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The government has committed itself – rhetorically, at least – to combating corruption and to implementing mechanisms of good governance. Nevertheless, under the pressure of vested interests in the state apparatus, the government is unable to effectively fight corruption. The IMF has given some political credit to the government for taking a few steps towards reforming the state oil company, privatizing a troubled bank (COFIPA) and reintegrating the country into the Kimberley Process (which concerns separating the sourcing of diamonds from conflict) to which the Republic of Congo was officially readmitted in November 2007. However, these improvements are overshadowed by a generally unsatisfactory performance when it comes to issues such as governance, transparency and corruption. In general, corruption is rampant at all levels and is considered a major obstacle to reforms by international observers, such as World Bank and the EIU. Indeed, although the country has long been among Africa’s leading exporters, over half of its citizens live below the poverty line.

16 | Consensus-Building

In the rhetoric of the regime, a market economy and democracy are major political objectives. As such, on a superficial level at least, these objectives are shared by a large part of Congolese society. It is, however, highly doubtful whether the government and the political forces backing it are really committed to a market economy and democracy. Sassou-Nguesso himself, alongside strong factions in the PCT, acted as major advocates of state interventionism and one-party rule from the 1970s through to the 1990s. If they are now presenting themselves as advocates of a market economy and democracy, this is due to the dominant international political climate and the need to gain the support of the donors rather than to a whole-hearted change of mind. The real advocates of democracy and market economy are more likely to be found in the weak opposition parties and in civil society. Despite a referendum and a state-orchestrated “national dialogue,” the government unilaterally imposed the new constitutional order rather than negotiating it multilaterally. In essence, substantial consensus-building has not taken place.

In general, the political forces supporting the government of Sassou-Nguesso and the PCT appear to be able – when they want – to exclude either politically or by force any actors that are not ready to cooperate with the government. Powerful veto actors have been defeated by divisive political maneuvers, including the use of force and incentives to allow co-optation. Given the authoritarian-style approach of
the government, it is doubtful whether economic and political reform is really on
the agenda. In this sense, the government itself is a major anti-reform veto actor.

As the recent history of the Republic of Congo clearly demonstrates, the country’s
conflicting political forces have not been able to manage political cleavages in a
peaceful manner. Although the government has worked hard to integrate as many
political and military forces as possible into the new system created in 2002, major
ethnic, regional, social and political cleavages remain. There is still potential in
Congolese society for the eruption of violence, which is difficult to assess in
concrete terms. Given the absence of deeper processes of reconciliation and
reintegration, the risk of renewed violent conflict cannot be ruled out. The
government exacerbates the potential for conflict by limiting high level political,
economic, and military positions to northerners, and especially Cuvette regionals.

In general, owing to its indisputable military strength and political supremacy, the
political leadership makes little effort to incorporate diverse CSOs into the policy-
making process. When civil society actors attempt to register their frustration with
corruption, their efforts are generally met with repression. Consequently, a
significant amount of self-censoring occurs.

Reconciliation between victims and perpetrators of past injustices is a very difficult
affair in Congo-Brazzaville. The political leadership and the government are less
involved in this than the churches and other religious and cultural actors. Religious
leaders are a respected non-partisan voice in the country. They were already
associated with the campaigns for democracy in the early 1990s, and they stressed
the importance of national reconciliation as the foundation for sustainable peace.
Governmental approaches to reconciliation and dialogue, which began as early as
1998, have had doubtful success as they have been imposed from above. Radical
forces like the politico-military movement of Pasteur Ntumi have had to accept the
peacemaking conditions set by the government if they want to participate. Ntumi
returned to Brazzaville in December 2009 to take the position of “Délégué général
chargé de la promotion des valeurs de paix et de la réparation des séquelles de
guerre” (“general delegate in charge of promoting peace and post-conflict
reconstruction”) that was offered to him by President Sassou-Nguesso. In 2005, the
late former Prime Minister Bernard Kolélas was granted amnesty from a death
sentence in 2005 when he declared his readiness to work for peace within the
government’s political framework. Former President Pascal Lissouba was also
granted amnesty from a 30-year sentence in 2009 but he has so far refused to return
to Brazzaville from exile.
Following its violent return to power in 1997, as a consequence of the stigmatization of non-constitutional takeovers by major powers and international organizations, the Sassou-Nguesso regime was internationally isolated. However, the government has been able to restore sustainable working relationships with most political groupings, including the European Union, the United Nations, the AU and some African subregional organizations. Reacting to the electoral victory of Barack Obama in November 2008, the Brazzaville government stated its readiness to improve its still-uneasy relationship with the United States. China is an increasingly important partner to the Sassou-Nguesso regime (both are interested in expanding Chinese stakes in the Congolese oil, forestry and mining sectors). France has remained the regime’s main Western sponsor. Moreover, Sassou-Nguesso continues to be backed by Angola.

Major donors in the country are the World Bank, the European Union, France, the African Development Bank and organizations within the United Nations system. Following the years of civil war and political turbulence, the Brazzaville government has made strong efforts to achieve full reintegration into the international community and to foster the image of being a reliable and disciplined partner that has democratic norms and stabilization-oriented macroeconomic policies, and uses external support in line with the needs of reconstruction, development and poverty reduction. The country works closely with international donors and generally uses international support to improve its policies. In general, political actors strive to cultivate cooperative international relationships. Although the government works with bilateral and multilateral international donors (e.g. the IMF and the World Bank), this does not facilitate significant policy learning and improvement. In order to improve its international image, however, the government has tried to make effective use of the resources provided by international partners. Nevertheless, corruption and a lack of transparency work as counterproductive factors.

In general, the government tries to present itself as a credible and reliable partner in its relations with the international community. This is especially the case at the levels of the United Nations, the AU and other international organizations, with which the country can gain positive standing without much financial and political cost. Thanks to its image of reliability, Congo-Brazzaville was chosen to become a nonpermanent member of the U.N. Security Council (for two years), and Sassou-Nguesso was chosen to lead the African Union for one year (2006 – 2007).

In general, the political leadership cooperates with many neighboring states and complies with the rules set by regional and international organizations. Relations with neighboring states are fairly positive. Even relations with the neighboring
Democratic Republic of the Congo, which have traditionally been difficult, are currently stable. A special relationship has been established with Gabon, whose late president, Omar Bongo, was married to the late Edith Lucie Nguesso, Sassou-Nguesso’s daughter. The Republic of Congo is committed to sub-regional organizations, such as the CEMAC and the Communauté Economique des Etats de l’Afrique Centrale (Economic Community of Central African States, CEEAC), as well as to other recently agreed-upon security frameworks. For instance, the Sassou-Nguesso regime has contributed troops to the CEMAC peacekeeping force in the Central African Republic. The Brazzaville government also took part in international sub-regional agreements on protecting tropical rainforests. In a broader sub-regional context, the Republic of Congo is striving to improve its relationship with the regional powerhouse, South Africa.
Strategic Outlook

The Republic of Congo remains burdened with political and economic problems. Although the government appears capable of managing sustainable political and economic transformation, it has shown little commitment to doing so. Congolese democracy is more of an imposed system shaped to the advantage of the Sassou-Nguesso regime than a system suitable for developing full-scale democratic structures. Economically, the country is still characterized by a high level of state intervention, which benefits the ruling elite. Although, when pressured, the country has taken steps toward introducing and implementing IMF- and World Bank-style policies directed at the emergence of a market economy, the Sassou-Nguesso family’s large interests in the oil and timber sectors often impede reforms. Corruption continues to adversely affect considerable parts of the economy and society.

The presidential elections of 2009 reinforced autocratic rule, only superficially concealed by formally democratic procedures. President Sassou-Nguesso and his political coalition continue to dominate the political scene, while opposition outside the PCT-RMP caucus remains marginalized. It is more likely that dissent within the ruling coalition will cause change rather than that there will be a challenge from outside, though the regime appears to be as stable as ever. Regarding the mid- and long-term transformation of the country, ambitious rehabilitation, poverty reduction, and development objectives have been set, and they were formulated in the framework of economic programs related to ECF (formerly PRGF) agreements concluded with the IMF in 2004 and 2008. Major aims are to: consolidate peace and good governance; consolidate the macroeconomic framework and recovery of the key productive sectors; improve access to basic social services and social protections; develop basic infrastructure; and strengthen the fight against HIV/AIDS, which is becoming more and more problematic.

The following factors may be considered essential in developmental terms:

• An anti-corruption and transparency campaign: Since rampant corruption is one of the main impediments to rehabilitation and development, the fight against it should be intensified. Measures should go beyond economic incentives, specific legislation and administrative measures; the culture of corruption and impunity at the highest levels of government must be targeted. For instance, the education system should combat this culture of corruption.

• Empowerment of women: Women have a major role to play in the country, and they are the group that is most seriously affected by HIV/AIDS. Thus, empowerment measures – including improvements in education, qualification and literacy – are crucial to the development of Congo-Brazzaville. Discrimination against women is a serious impediment to development that can be prevented through increased educational opportunities for girls and women at all levels of the educational system. Education should also teach boys and men to accept gender equality as a strategic objective that is of vital importance to the country’s future.
• Social service provision to children and youth: Since impoverishment and disillusionment among Congolese youth heavily contributed to the violence of the civil war, the empowerment of children and youth is a vitally important factor for the future development of the country. Empowerment could assume the form of education, vocational training and job creation, as well as the provision of opportunities for leisure-time activities. Peace education, including instruction on nonviolent solutions to conflict situations, would also help greatly in preventing violent conflict.

• Education and training: Given the importance of education and training in the areas stressed above, improvement in education is highly crucial to the future development of the country. Although the importance of education has been identified in various reports, as well as in political action, this issue should receive greater attention.